

3-1-1942

Theological Observer. – Kirchlich Zeitgeschichtliches

J. T. Mueller

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mueller, J. T. (1942) "Theological Observer. – Kirchlich Zeitgeschichtliches," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 13 , Article 18.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol13/iss1/18>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Theological Observer — Kircklich-Zeitgeschichtliches

The Lutheran Free Church and Lutheran Church Union.—According to a translation kindly furnished us of an article that appeared in *Folkebladet*, the official organ of the Lutheran Free Church, last summer, this Church views with utter disapproval the attempts of the American Lutheran Church and Missouri to establish church-fellowship on the basis of doctrinal unity. Among other things the writer says, "It is a very likely possibility that the Lutheran Free Church will be offered for acceptance a document pertaining to union with the Missouri Synod, since our body is one of the other four in the American Lutheran Conference. The result of this would be that the American Lutheran Conference would be split. For it does not lie within the realm of possibility that the Lutheran Free Church would subscribe to such a document. And should a bare majority (which is not very likely) want it, then it would mean the splitting of the Lutheran Free Church."

As to the course of the other bodies forming the American Lutheran Conference, the writer in *Folkebladet* has some interesting things to say. Concerning the American Lutheran Church he states, assuming that a common document will be drawn up, "No one can tell what the American Lutheran Church will do; perhaps it does not itself as yet know what it will do." Of the other bodies the writer says, "So far as the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America is concerned, it will have to be said that even if that body has a strong influential faction which looks with longing eyes toward St. Louis because they are descendants of fathers who were born there, and there is not an inconsiderable degree of friendly relationship between leaders in the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America and 'the little synod' which is entirely with Missouri, yet we have reason to believe that the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America would think twice and three times, yea, perhaps even more times, before it parted company with the American Lutheran Conference and the other Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish brethren. The United Danish Lutheran Church stands about as does the Lutheran Free Church in this, that in it there may perhaps be those who care not whither it tends, but the leadership and the vast majority of congregations would refuse to subscribe. And concerning the Augustana Synod it will also have to be said that it would be split if a majority in it would want to go with Missouri; something which would also happen in the Norwegian Lutheran Church. It is therefore a sad picture which these negotiations concerning union paint for all of us."

It is difficult for us who have been brought up in the atmosphere of confessional Lutheranism to understand the position of the Lutheran Free Church. In order that our readers may more fully become acquainted with the position of the writer in *Folkebladet*, we shall quote a few additional paragraphs. "The Lutheran Free Church will never go to Missouri on these stipulated conditions. That we believe to be a sure premise. We believe it ought to be made known. What else

could we do? To subscribe would be to deny our entire past, to declare that what we have struggled for through forty-five years and what Augsburg Seminary has worked for through seventy-two years has had no worth. We would, then, say that George Sverdrup and Sven Oftedal were all wrong in their battle on behalf of the congregation and lay activity and the education of our pastors and the instruction of the young. . . . Or has Missouri perhaps changed? It does not seem so. Everything which comes from that quarter in the interest of union bears in its bosom the same old slavishness and the oldness of the letter. Missouri is not able to understand that the solution of our present-day problems lies not in a much ado about theses, but, on the contrary, in the working together — cooperation. Missouri will never go along on that without doctrinal unity. And the doctrines must always conform to the Missourian pattern. This is a *naïveté* which both surprises and offends. But it is German. The Germans do not seem to understand us inhabitants of the North. The Germans are the bearers of a slave mentality which can never control the Nordic spirit. Thus it is in Germany in political affairs; and thus it is over here in Church affairs. Just consider this matter of unionism! Such rules and regulations we should go along on! Bible-passages are cited as points of support. We on our part look upon such proof-passages as a sinful misuse of God's Word, because there isn't a single one of all the proof-passages they present which, so far as the Church is concerned, has the least whatsoever to do with the case in point. It is 'irrelevant' proof material. Not a single one of all the Scripture-passages which the Missouri Synod and those sailing in its yoke have dished up against 'unionism' has the least whatsoever to do with the matter; on the contrary, they condemn those who use Scripture-passages to build up a wall between those whom Christ has acknowledged as His own. What right has Missouri or any one else to make demands which Scripture does not make, in order to be recognized as a Christian? Well, Missouri will perhaps say, we recognize them, to be sure, as Christians after a fashion but not as such Christians with whom we can have fellowship. The great light which has arisen over Missouri and which no one else sees, had better remain with Missouri. Do you suppose it might be a spiritual counterpart of the German super-race theory?"

There is more to the same purpose, but we think enough has been quoted to show our readers where the Lutheran Free Church stands and why it condemns Missouri's position. It simply cannot understand the effort to maintain confessional loyalty which has characterized our Synod from its inception. If the charge that the Missouri Synod misquotes Scripture-passages in its battle against unionism were universally true, we could not change our course too quickly. But is it true? The mere assertion of *Folkebladet* does not constitute evidence. Perhaps texts are occasionally misapplied, because we are all fallible. But can it be said that Missouri Synod pastors misrepresent Scripture-teaching when they declare that indifference in matters of doctrine is condemned in God's Word? The testimony of the Scriptures on this point is simply overwhelming. We wish to say furthermore that we regret to see the Lutheran Free Church look upon our urging that confessional loyalty

be maintained by all Lutherans as due to an *inherited* national trait. If the writer became better acquainted with our church-body, we fancy he would be amazed at its cosmopolitan character. Finally, we can assure the Lutheran Free Church that we have no longing to see it become enslaved to any position of ours, but we do earnestly desire that it should accept fully the teachings of Holy Scripture as laid down in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church. According to our conviction, being loyally Lutheran implies being faithful to everything our Savior teaches. That conviction dictates our course.

A.

Suggestions for the Present War Crisis.—*The Christian Beacon*, ably edited by the brilliant Bible-Presbyterian controversialist Rev. Carl McIntire, contains in its recent issues a number of timely articles and editorials which we here pass on for the possible use by our pastors. When the first young man of Pastor McIntire's church was killed in action, the sympathetic minister sent the following letter to each communicant member: "As your pastor in the Lord I feel constrained to write you this personal note. These are going to be days of increasing strain and opportunity; and, thank God, the deep and mighty things of His holy Word are going to mean more and more to us. There are certain things on my heart that I want to ask you to do and to do just as faithfully as you would any other request which you may receive to help defend our land. Our spiritual fortifications must be maintained. Our strength of soul and morale must be replenished. First, let us pray more for each other, more for the families of our church, and, of course, for our land, for victory. Second, let us be more faithful and diligent in attending the services of divine worship. We all need every one of these in order that we may receive the blessing of God which He so graciously gives. You should remember the prayer-meeting on Wednesdays. Put these services first, and come. Third, let us use every possible opportunity to speak of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. God is judging our nation! Since the outbreak of the war men are so receptive to the message of salvation. On every hand I am hearing of interest and queries which men are making. We have the only message that can save their souls. Be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Do everything in your power to get your friends to the house of God to hear the Word. A strong people spiritually will be a great nation at war, and we must do our part for the glory of God and the honor of His Son. Fourth, read your Bible more. Carry a Testament with you at all times. Our spiritual 'air-raid instructions' is God's Word. God has given us such a blessed opportunity in these last days, and it is required of stewards that they be faithful. He has an abundance of comfort, an undiminishable supply of grace, and an unassailable arsenal of power. Let us all do our full part! 'The eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.' Yours affectionately. . . ."

We wonder whether this appealing approach would not prove effective also in our circles. At any rate, the letter is well suited for publication in our church bulletins. The reference to the mid-week prayer-meeting must, of course, be altered or omitted as well as the

ambiguous statement about doing "our part for the glory of God and the honor of His Son."

An editorial entitled "War" closes with the stirring words: "God is a God of war; He is a God of peace; He is a God of love; but He is also a God of wrath. He raises up nations that they may be instruments of His in wrath and judgment upon others. New and vital opportunities of witnessing are now open to Christians everywhere. The realities of death and the horrors of war open the door for the presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The true Christian has the assurance that even though war should rise up against him, God will be with him. Such things as famine, nakedness, peril, and sword cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. The supreme hour of American history has come. In that supreme hour she must have God as she never had Him before—to lead, to bless, to comfort, and to deliver. May God help us!"

Under the heading "Religious Education" we read: "The solution of the problem [of Christian education] is not to put religion into the [public] school in classes but to get the school to go to the churches. This has been attempted in New York State by releasing the children to go to the church of their choice. This recognizes the true principle of separation [of Church and State] and also of individual liberty in the receiving of the instruction desired. The real solution of the problem is in church-schools. The Roman Catholics have it in parochial schools. The Lutherans of the Missouri Synod and some of the Reformed churches have it in their parochial schools. Let us not in these days of confusion think we can help the problem by introducing religion into the schools, tying up the State to religion, and besides offering something that would not be the truth as it is in Jesus Christ."

These sane words on the moot question of religious education deserve our recognition and support. Since the Bible Presbyterians are staunch supporters of the Lutheran Hour, it is largely through this channel that they have become aware of the true solution of the religious education problem. The present war crisis ought not result in a decrease but rather in an increase of our Christian parish-schools.

J. T. M.

Decaying Protestantism.—The *Christian Beacon* strikes a most serious note when, under the heading just quoted, it writes: "We carry a brief story, which was also carried in *Time* magazine of November 17. In this story it is related how a Congregationalist who turned Roman Catholic instructs the Catholic Church that now is the hour, on top of a decaying Protestantism, to launch a great Catholic drive. He speaks of a discredited group of Fundamentalists without leadership. His estimate of things is not far from wrong. Those who think and see what is happening know that American Protestantism is decaying. Its adherence to the Bible as the infallible Word of God, its exaltation of the Virgin-born Son of God, its loyalty to the historic faith have changed. Of course, the same old religious terms are being used, but they do not mean the same today. In the presence of the weakness and the impotence of Protestantism, certainly the hour is ripe for Rome and the exaltation of its ancient appeal through the Church to offer men

something — yes, something — anything, for men will grab at straws today. The Fundamentalists are despised, discredited. Truly, so have been those who through the years have manifested the great verities of the faith. But it is comforting, at least, to recognize that they are around. The most discredited person in Jesus' day was the religious authority — Jesus Christ Himself. Any man who surveyed the religious horizon of that hour would have spoken of Jesus of Nazareth as being a discredited person. He endured the shame of crucifixion. But Christians, though the days be dark, though many may weaken and falter, *we cannot!* Christians, we must be ever loyal to God's Word, obedient to His Son, no matter what names or classifications are given. The Roman Catholics delight in taking their converts from Protestantism and exalt and honor them. Let those who have been saved by faith testify to Christ that others may be won out of the bondage of the superstition of the Roman Catholic order into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Jesus Christ is our only High Priest. *He alone is our High Priest.*"

Certainly, a bold and open confession! Here is no weakness of voice and conviction, but only Lutherlike clearness and courage in the face of opposition and contempt. May the spirit of triumphant witnessing fill us the more since we have the full truth of salvation in our own precious confessions, bequeathed to us as a sacred heritage for just such times as these.

Referring to the fact that the Pearl Harbor tragedy occurred because the highest ranking American commanders in the Hawaiian Islands were not on the alert, the *Christian Beacon* draws this timely lesson: "What does the living God think of His servants, the ministers of the Gospel, who have ceased to be on the alert against the enemies of Christ? Unbelief and Modernism, the enemies of the Lord, have come in like a flood. The watchmen upon the tower are no longer on the alert! The apostasy in the Christian Church today came in because men were not on the alert. Why do God's people not act in this battle and be done with such leaders?" The answer to the question is simple. In the modernized churches the faithful confessors are stifled into silence, and it is a costly price they must pay whenever they leave the modernistic oppressors and form their own small, confessing groups. Unbelief is intolerant and tyrannical and has in a number of cases deprived faithful confessors of their church-property.

J. T. M.

Brief Items. — In a debate held in Boston between Dr. Frederick May Eliot, president of the American Unitarian Association, and Dr. Bernard Iddings Bell, a prominent Episcopalian, Dr. Eliot, according to the *Living Church* (Protestant Episcopal), "presented the claims of an individualistic religion, while Dr. Bell contended for a liberal catholicism in which authority rests on the collective reaction of Christendom to revelation." The report says that both debaters agreed "in the inadequacy of a Protestantism which is dogmatic without the mystical concept of the Church to back it up." What confusion to make the Church, which is guided by divine revelation, a source of revelation!

Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims (Congregationalist), in Brooklyn, known as the Henry Ward Beecher Church, has a new pastor, L. Wendell

Fifield of Seattle. According to the *Christian Century* he announced, "I do not sign any petitions, join propaganda groups, or endorse candidates for public office."

The *National Lutheran Council Bulletin* reports that "Sweden is this year celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of the printing of the first complete Bible in the Swedish language. The New Testament had been translated and published as early as 1526, but the Old Testament translation was not completed until fifteen years later." The chief translator was Olavus Petri, who had studied under Luther at Wittenberg. In the University of Lund several dissertations having to do with this early translation of the Bible have appeared.

The church press reports that when recently the Catholic Laymen's Committee for Peace polled the Catholic clergy on the question whether the United States should engage in a shooting war outside the Western hemisphere, only 885 answered, Yes, while 12,038 answered, No. *America* (Roman Catholic weekly) states that the Catholic Laymen's Committee for Peace in circularizing clergy "neither sought nor had any ecclesiastical approval."

Very properly the *Watchman-Examiner* (Baptist) protests against the participation of Protestant ministers in the dedication of a synagog at Hebron, Conn. An Episcopalian minister, Rev. Harold R. Keen, was one of the speakers and praised the event as an indication of the "closer relations existing between religious groups today." The *Watchman-Examiner* quite properly says, "How can any of the followers of Jesus give their money to perpetuate a blind unbelief that denies Him His claims? After all, we must be sincere even when we would be kind."

From the *Lutheran* (U. L. C. A.) we learn that the *Nordland* reports that in the German universities in the second term of 1940 only 307 were enrolled as students of theology and in the third term 402, while before the war the number of theological students was from 5,000 to 6,000. The *Nordland*, a German paper, uses these figures to bolster or to justify its stand to the effect that theology should not be taught in the German universities. We agree.

From England comes the news that the Free Churches reject the proposal for union with the Church of England. The *Living Church* (Protestant Episcopal) states, "Formidable theological differences stand in the way of any proposed union of the Anglican and Free Church bodies of England, according to the Free Church Federal Council, which has been in session in London. The Free Church statement was in the nature of a reply to documents proposing reunion which were prepared three years ago by a joint commission of Anglican and Free Church men."

Another report by the Gallup poll shows that the three most popular forms of gambling indulged in by Americans during the past year were church lotteries, card or dice games, and slot machines. 24 per cent. of the country's population participated in each of these. Next in popularity came punch-boards, which attracted 23 per cent. This report of the *Christian Century* confirms the sad truth that our nation is more and more succumbing to the allurements of secularization.

How best the radio may deal with the Bible was discussed by Canon Anthony Deane in an address to ministers last week. He was emphatic in his claim that a return to the reading and understanding of the Bible was necessary if the country is to be rechristianized. He believed that those who direct our radio could best help in this service by making the treatment of the Bible center in the person of our Lord. They could bring home to listeners in every-day language the meaning of the text, using the immense gains of the last 50 years' studies. They would be wise to distinguish between questions which were of interest to scholars only and those which every thoughtful reader of the Bible must answer.—*Christian Century* (in correspondence from England).

Among the church-bodies which have recently gone on record against American entrance into the war are the Baptist State conventions in New York and Ohio. The Presbyterian synod of New York condemned war as a "manifestation of sin," and refused to adopt a minority report which censured the majority report for having failed to take a stand against "Nazi tyranny and conquest."—So reports the *Christian Century*. We advise these people to study Art. XVI of the Augustana.

In Carl Sandburg's "Abraham Lincoln: The War Years" there is an account of a minister saying to Lincoln that he "hoped the Lord is on our side." To which Lincoln is quoted as replying: "I don't agree with you. I am not at all concerned about that, for we know that the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

Christian Century

I wish some really dispassionate, well-informed critic would explain why it is that the adherents of the lunatic-fringe religions, whose theological systems are hardly on a par with Greek mythology in rationality, are nevertheless the salt of the earth in piety, industry, zeal, enthusiasm, and practical social altruism, whereas the communicants of the more rational, sophisticated sects are notoriously poor in the fruits of the Spirit. Whether this sentence printed in the *Christian Century* states the facts correctly we do not know. It has, however, often been remarked that Modernism is a close relative of Epicureanism.

Fred I. Cairns, minister of First Presbyterian Church, Conway, Ark., has resigned his fellowship in the Presbyterian Church to join the Unitarians. A native of Houston, Mr. Cairns attributes his change in theology to his year at Edinburgh, Scotland, where he sat under John Baillie. While this step may seem inexplicable to many readers of the *Christian Century*, they should remember that Presbyterianism in the South has clung much more tenaciously to Calvinism than its northern counterpart. Consequently the minister touched by Modernism finds himself under considerable tension. Mr. Cairns becomes minister of Pilgrim Church, El Paso, which is a federated Unitarian-Congregationalist parish.

Christian Century

As the one practicable substitute for the President's "four freedoms," Dr. John H. McComb, of the Broadway Church, New York, names the four freedoms offered by Christ: Freedom from the wrath to come, from the power of sin, from the hopeless task of earning one's way to heaven,

and from the fear of death. Dr. McComb will, we are sure, have no objection to our suggestion that he has here given many another preacher the outline for a great sermon. — *The Presbyterian*.

In Englewood, N. J., Dr. F. J. Foakes-Jackson, who from 1916 to 1934 served as professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York, departed this life. His chief field of interest was the early history of the Christian Church. Among his books are "Peter, Prince of Apostles," "The Rise of Gentile Christianity," "History of the Christian Church from the Earliest Times to A. D. 461," "Studies in the Life of the Early Church."

As evidence that deterioration in morals has set in one might point to the suggestion of Senator Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma to launch a national lottery for aid in the financing of the war. One cannot without deep sorrow view the attempt of a prominent legislator to legalize gambling.

In Kansas City the Independence Boulevard Christian Church was given a bequest amounting to more than one hundred thousand dollars to which the strange condition was attached that the minister who was in charge at the time would have to be discharged within sixty days after the death of the testator. When the bequest and the condition were made known, the minister resigned and the resignation was — accepted. The testator had been one of the elders.

At the Maywood Lutheran Seminary (U. L. C. A.) the Rev. Armin George Weng, President of the Illinois Synod of the United Lutheran Church, was chosen as professor of historical theology and was appointed president of the school for the remainder of this school-year, thus temporarily filling the vacancy caused by the death of Dr. Gruber.

In 1941 there were four lynchings in the United States, one less than in 1940. The *Christian Century* (non-denominational), reporting this matter, states that in 19 instances officers of the law prevented lynchings, that all those lynched were Negroes, and that the lynchings occurred in the Southeastern States.

A certain preacher once said, "The two outstanding characteristics of the first-century Church were poverty and power." The two outstanding characteristics of the Church in modern times are wealth and weakness. — *Watchman-Examiner* (Baptist).

The U. L. C. A. papers announce that in their church-body this year the bicentennial of the arrival in America of Henry Melchior Muehlenberg will be observed. Congress has sanctioned the appointment of a bicentennial commission, of which President Roosevelt is the honorary chairman.

Devere Allen, editor of the *Worldover Press*, predicts that the "real wave of the future" is a wave of crime. He cites the fact that offenders under 21 years of age now constitute 48 per cent. of arrests in London and notes that crime is on the increase in a number of countries.

Christian Century (non-denominational)

John Evjen of Carthage College (U. L. C. A.), interested in popularizing Sohm's idea of the Church, died in January of this year. A.